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The translator as secondary witness: Mediating memory in Antelme's *L'espèce humaine*

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The primary aim of this article is to define and problematize the role of the translator as a “secondary witness” within the context of Holocaust memory transmission. It argues that the translator occupies an ethical position in relation to the survivor, one which necessitates that the translator is attuned to and perpetuates the communicative force of the original testimony. The article further recognizes the quandary of speaking the ineffable that attends trauma narratives, a representational bind which is then compounded in translation proper. In order to explore the effects of translation as an act of secondary witnessing, a case study will be undertaken on Haight and Mahler's English version of Antelme's (1947) seminal depiction of the concentrationary universe, *L'espèce humaine*. Drawing on Hatim and Mason (1990), the study will focus on the communicative, pragmatic and semiotic contexts of re-witnessing.

Keywords: translation; secondary witnessing; Holocaust; Antelme; testimony; trauma

Memory, its mechanisms and manifestations have in recent years become the focal point of numerous disciplines beyond the traditional boundaries of psychology, to include history, literature, sociology, philosophy and art. This so-called “turn to memory” has led to the emergence of the broad field of memory studies which is defined both by its diversity and its disjointedness: Astrid Erll sees it as “a promising, but also as yet incoherent and dispersed field” (2008, 1), while Geoffrey Cubitt juxtaposes its status as “a peculiarly busy interdisciplinary area” against the fact that it is “not [...] a coherent and unified field of enquiry” (2007, 2). However, if there is one constant which cuts across this seemingly disparate landscape, it is the problematization of memory as a mediation of the past. In cognitive terms, memory reconstruction is revealed to be susceptible to partial encodings and gaps; in historical terms, the concepts of individual and collective memory have come to destabilize discourses of historical objectivity; and in literary terms, considerable debate has arisen with regard to the possibilities and limits of representation.

But while memory may be problematized as a mediation of the past, its *re*-mediation through translation has largely gone unheeded within memory studies. This blind spot attests

to a striking absence of dialogue between memory studies and translation studies; in spite of both fields' fundamental interdisciplinarity, mutually informative synergies have yet to be fully identified and exploited. Of note, however, is the emerging body of work on the translation of the Holocaust. For example, Piotr Kuhiwczak (2007) explores the hermeneutic impact of translation on eyewitness accounts, foregrounding the multilingual significance of testimonies; Raffaella Baccolini and Federico Zanettin (2008) underscore the impossibility of the compulsion to accurately convey trauma, before presenting a case study on how translation perpetuates or transforms this paradox; Peter Davies (2008 and 2011) accentuates translation's role in how Holocaust narratives are mediated by genre and subsequently understood in the receiving culture; and Jean Boase-Beier (2011) considers the translation of silence in Celan's poetry from a cognitive linguistic perspective. This sensitive, complex and necessary line of enquiry into translating the trauma of the Holocaust has thus laid the foundations for a more sustained, deliberate and coherent engagement with memory studies.

The present article aims to continue in such a vein, both in its focus on Holocaust writing and in its attempt to reinforce intersections between translation studies and memory studies. The figure of the "secondary witness", namely "one who listens to the [survivor's] testimony with empathy and helps to record, store and transmit it" (Assman 2006, 9), will be proposed as a bridging concept between the two fields. More specifically, the translator of Holocaust memoirs will be recast as a secondary witness and his/her role in the transmission of the survivor's testimony will be scrutinized by means of a case study on Robert Antelme's seminal account of life in Nazi work camps, *L'espèce humaine* (1947), and its English translation by Jeffrey Haight and Annie Mahler, *The Human Race* (1992). As a result, translation studies will benefit from a heightened understanding of the role of the translator within the context of Holocaust writing, and of the illocutionary and ethical implications of their translation choices. In turn, memory studies will be exposed to the transformative powers of linguistic and cultural reframing, and this awareness may stimulate a more nuanced approach to their translated objects of enquiry. Overall, it is hoped that the heuristic trajectories of both fields will be expanded and reinforced in a meaningful way by this interdisciplinary study.

The secondary witness

The metaphorical relationship that holds between survivor-witnessing and translation has long been recognized in Holocaust studies, where the crisis of representation that attends each attempt to communicate life in the camps is often mapped on to the fraught transmission of

meaning between one language system and another. Antelme himself felt the impossibility of his task, avowing that “We have seen what men are not to see; it was not translatable into language” (1996, 22). The significance of translation proper as a vehicle of transmission, however, has been less readily acknowledged. This is a reticence which may in part be explained by the fact that to focus on the practices of translation is to open testimonies up to difficult questions of accuracy. Given that “a common preoccupation of Holocaust survivors is the fear that they won’t be believed” (Waxman 2006, 169), interlingual translation risks compounding the problems of communication inherent in the initial figurative stages of the translating experience, and in so doing, also risks undermining the credibility of these testimonies. Exceptionally though, much of Primo Levi’s writing does confront the challenges of translation¹. In reference to the German translation of *If This is a Man*, for example, he demands that “nothing should be lost of [the original’s] harshness and the violence inflicted on the language [...]. More than a book, it should be a tape recording” (1987, 141-2). Here, Levi resists translation and its transformative potential by effectively denying it, by invoking the altogether different modality of sound recording as a duplicative and evidentiary line of defence against translation loss on the level of text. The impossibility of translation which lends itself as a metaphor to the frustrated or unrecoverable articulation of experience then becomes doubly impossible once attempted – or *re-translated* – across new linguistic and cultural boundaries.

While the analogic and applied corollaries between translation and witnessing in the context of Holocaust writing have undoubtedly been recognized, these parallels have nevertheless been drawn with a certain degree of abstraction. Not only do the actual transformative effects of translation go unqualified, but the figure of the translator is notably absent from the processes of expression and transmission. As a subjective and experiencing self, the translator will necessarily engage with the testimony of the survivor. And yet the impact of such agency on the retelling and perpetuation of the original act of witnessing has gone uncharted. In order to frame the translator of Holocaust testimonies in a more definite subject position, this article will turn to memory studies and to the concept of the secondary witness which arose from the work of Dori Laub, psychoanalyst and cofounder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale. Far from positing survivor testimony as the isolated act of an individual, Laub argues that:

Bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an other – in the position of one who hears. (1992, 70-1)

In this sense, the presence of the listener facilitates the communication of past experience and trauma; bearing witness becomes contingent on reception, and the receiver of the testimony is integral in its realization. Hence the status of the secondary witness, the one who, despite not having first-hand knowledge of the original events, becomes a necessary and active figure in the restitution, mediation and transmission of memory. Likewise, the translator as a hermeneutic listener to and receiver of the survivor's lived experience plays a fundamental role in its reconstruction and retranslation.

Admittedly, Laub's secondary witness shares a physical and temporal immediacy with the survivor, as captured in the video testimonies which "show that memory and testimony are acts in the present" (Hirsch and Spitzer 2010, 402), while the dynamics between the translator and survivor may be more complex. Take for example the translation of Eli Wiesel's *La nuit* into English, where the initial act of secondary witnessing by Stella Rodway in 1960 is further removed from the original witness than the act embodied in the 2006 retranslation by Wiesel's own wife. Similarly, secondary witnessing in translation can be hastened or deferred; David Rousset's (1946) *L'Univers concentrationnaire* appears in English one year later as *The Other Kingdom*, but Agnès Humbert's (1946) *Notre guerre* is not made available to an Anglophone audience until 2008. But whether such secondary witnessing is near or far, in time or space, the attendant act of listening is ultimately crystallized in the resultant target text. This text can be read just as Hirsch and Spitzer claim the videotape can be watched, i.e. for signs of "how an event lives on, how it acquires, keeps, and changes its meaning and its legacy" (2010, 402).

Intrinsic to any act of secondary witnessing is also the desire to *assist* the original testifier, in both senses of the word: to be present as a listener, and to support the transmission of their testimony. But the precise nature of that assistance has been subject to considerable debate within memory studies with Dominick LaCapra asking the poignant question: "What is the relationship between the primary and the secondary witness? Is it – or ought it to be – one of full identification or total 'empathy'?" (1998, 102). In other words, the positionality of the secondary witness can be expressed as one of two possible and widely different acts: identification or empathy. It is the latter empathetic response to the survivor which LaCapra himself advocates in his call for "a secondary witness [...] who resists full identification and the dubious appropriation of the status of victim" (2001, 70). Similarly, Hirsch and Spitzer prescribe that the listener "must allow the testimony to move, haunt and endanger her; she must allow it to inhabit her, without appropriating or owning it" (2010, 402). Crucially, this empathetic engagement is to be achieved without an appropriation of the

inscrutable experiences of the survivor. However, Bettina Stumm points to the difficulty of maintaining this privileged stance in her observation that “secondary witnesses are apt to assimilate the unfamiliar to that which they have experienced or can understand” (2010, 356). And in the case of the translator as secondary witness, the risk of appropriation is compounded, for translation has always been, in George Steiner’s terms, a hermeneutic motion, an “act of elicitation and appropriative transfer of meaning” (1975, 312). Furthermore, Basil Hatim and Ian Mason regard it as inevitable that translators will “feed [their] own beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and so on into [their] processing of texts, so that any translation will, to some extent, reflect the translator’s own mental and cultural outlook, despite the best of impartial intentions” (1990, 11). But this appropriative motion cannot and should not persist in the translation of traumatic memory. First, because meaning in survivor testimonies is often elusive, unstable or irrecoverable, so to use translation as a compensatory or explicatory device is both reductive and questionable. Secondly, to appropriate the sheer otherness of the survivor’s experience into recognizable modes of being and saying would belie the trauma therein, not least the attendant dilemmas of understanding and representation.

The role of the translator as secondary witness thus becomes nuanced by concerns of an ethical nature. The translator’s dialogic engagement with what Cathy Caruth terms “the address of another” (1996, 9) is also the assumption of responsibility for the preservation and transmission of the memory of that other. Moreover, Laub asserts that the responsibility or “task of the listener is to be unobtrusively present throughout the testimony” (1992, 71). This is a paradoxical challenge for the translator, and one which has implications for the translator’s visibility as championed by Lawrence Venuti. The very epithet of ‘secondary’ witnessing already seems to jar with Venuti’s refusal of translation as “second-order” or “derivative” in relation to the “individualistic conception of authorship” (1992, 7). However, within the context of secondary witnessing, the rules of engagement are more complex; the authorship involved in the process of bearing witness is by no means individualistic, but is instead dependent on and initiated through the presence of a receiver. The translator is secondary to the extent that they are one step removed from the lived experience being recounted, but nevertheless play an essential and generative role in its telling. Furthermore, while Venuti rejects the psychological identification of the translator with the author, he does so on the grounds that it equates to the “self-annihilation” (ibid., 8) of the former. But any assimilation of the Holocaust victim’s fractured selfhood to the translator’s own recognizable and coherent markers will necessarily lead to the annihilation of the witness.

And so, the visibility of the translator as secondary witness is not a clear-cut issue. We might rework LaCapra's question above to ask if the translator is – or ought to be – in/visible in the transmission of memory. Any obtrusion in the narrative of the survivor will lead to a discontinuity of witnessing, thereby threatening to render the survivor and their experiences invisible. Conversely, for the survivor to bear witness the translator must be present, without whom interlingual and intercultural transmission would not take place. Secondary witnessing through translation thus introduces an underlying tension into the text itself, and the case study below will, in broad terms, attempt to discern how the presence of the translator might facilitate, avert or subvert the transmission of the survivor's memory.

Approaching traumatic memory in translation

In the same way as the translator as secondary witness has an ethical responsibility towards the survivor, so too is the onus on the researcher of Holocaust writing to respect the lived experience of the other and shield it from the risk of reductionism. This moral obligation, keenly felt in memory studies, is no less pertinent to the present study. The comparative analysis section below will take its lead from the approach expressed by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in their influential work, *Testimony*, on the intersections between trauma, writing and witnessing: “our ultimate concern has been with the preservation [...] both of the uniqueness of experience in the face of its theorization, and of the shock of the unintelligible in the face of the attempt at its interpretation” (1992, xx). In this sense, care will be taken to ensure that the harsh and perplexing reality of Antelme's testimony is not subordinated to or abstracted by the theoretical exploration of translation behaviour.

Nevertheless, in order to ascertain the implications of the translator's role as a mediator of memory, the comparative analysis of source and target text will necessarily be predicated on certain theoretical and interpretative manoeuvres. The first of these is to acknowledge the writing of testimony in general, and *L'espèce humaine* in particular, as a performative speech act. For as Felman affirms, “[t]o testify – to vow, to tell, to promise and produce one's own speech as material evidence for truth – is to accomplish a speech act, rather than simply formulate a statement” (1995, 17, original emphasis). Viewed from this Austinian perspective, Antelme's work can be understood as a socially embedded act which sets out to achieve certain communicative goals through the illocutionary force of words. It is in the preface to *L'espèce humaine* that the survivor makes explicit reference to two definite, yet indissociable, motivations. First, Antelme attempts to “report what I have lived through” (1957, 11), in order to allow the reader access to the horrors of his daily existence in the

kommando at Gandersheim (a subdivision of Buchenwald), and his harrowing death march to Dachau. Concurrently, he endeavours to “bring into clear view [the] indivisible unity” (ibid.) of the human species, thereby leading the reader via his experiences to considerations of a more anthropological and ethical nature. However, both the illocutionary force of the translated testimony and the response it elicits from the target-language reader, i.e. its perlocutionary force, are largely dependent on how the translator functions as a secondary witness. Since testimonies are interpersonal, motivated and representationally complex speech acts, the comparative analysis below will draw on Hatim and Mason’s (1990) three-dimensional approach to explore translation in its communicative, pragmatic and semiotic context. Specifically, this approach will first allow an evaluation of how the translator as secondary witness repositions Antelme’s testimony within a new temporal and cultural communicative situation. It will then take into consideration the fact that “in order to perceive the full communicative thrust of an utterance, we need to appreciate not only the pragmatic action, but also [the] semiotic dimension which regulates the interaction of the various discursual elements as ‘signs’” (ibid., 101). Analytical focus will thus centre on how closely the translator listens to and retransmits Antelme’s stated goals through the reselection of target language signs on the levels of text and discourse.

But the performativity of Antelme’s testimony can be nuanced further still if we approach his act of writing as not simply a straightforward account of lived experience, but a working through of trauma. According to LaCapra, this process of working through begins “[w]hen the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance and perspective” (2001, 90), and these criteria are all discernible in *L’espèce humaine*. While for Antelme and his fellow survivors, their memory of the past “was altogether alive and [they] were feeling a frenetic desire to tell it as it was” (1957, 9), the control which they exerted over its representation was nevertheless limited and resulted in a very physical manifestation of frustration: “We only had to start to tell and we were choking” (ibid.). At the same time, however, Antelme points to creativity as a means of working through the unspeakable horrors of life in the camps and reasserting some modicum of control, in that “the only way in which we could attempt to say something about it was through choosing, [...] through imagining” (ibid.). Or, in the words of Kofmann, Antelme’s testimony “underscores the need for fabulation, for the selection of events and therefore of writing, when trying to communicate unbearable truths” (1998, 37). Likewise, *L’espèce humaine* can be read as a working through of trauma in the sense that it represents “a striving towards intelligibility; analysis” (Hautois 2006, 143). One of the most

evident consequences of this analysis is, as mentioned above, the emergence of the indivisibility of the human species as an enduring and critical countermeasure against the rupture and the destruction of the SS machine.

It follows that the process of working through which attends Antelme's testimony must also be recognized in the comparative approach of the case study below. Hatim and Mason argue that "text producers make their choices in such a way as best to serve their own communicative ends" (1990, 193), with the result that texts and discourses as signs will be marked by their pragmatic context. In this respect, *L'espèce humaine* bears the traces of Antelme's creativity on a textual level in his attempt to reconcile his desire to tell of life in the camps as it was and the impossibility of speaking the ineffable, as well as the traces of his critical perspective on a discoursal level in his attempt to resist the brutality of the Nazi regime by foregrounding the indivisibility of the human species. In his work, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, James E. Young acknowledges both the importance of the choices of the witness, conscious or otherwise, and the perlocutionary force of those very choices: "the 'poetics' of literary testimony not only framed the writers' experiences as they unfolded, shaping both their understanding and responses; but, the language, tropes, and selected details of their texts ultimately shape our understanding of events afterwards" (1998, 10-11). This dual perspective is important in the consideration of which benchmarks to adopt in the exploration of how the translator serves (or disserves) as a secondary witness, and is echoed in Hatim and Mason's observation that "[t]he translator, in addition to being a competent processor of intentions in any SL text, must be in a position to make judgements about the likely effects of translation on TL readers/hearers" (65). Any comparative analysis between the original and the translated testimony must, therefore, elucidate the extent to which the textual and discoursal choices encoded by Antelme have been heard by Haight and Mahler, before then discerning how the choices encoded by these secondary witnesses serve to shape (or distort) the epistemological window which the survivor had created on to his concentrationary universe.

But this emphasis on understanding is not without its risks, not least because testimonies are sites of both "knowing and not knowing" (Caruth 1996, 4), and the translator as secondary witness must also be attuned to those moments where the events outdistance the capacity of cognition to process and of language to tell. Thus, Hatim and Mason's claim that "the hearer/reader's task is to construct a model of the speaker/writer's communicative intention, consistent with indications forthcoming from the text being processed and with what he or she knows about the world at large" (1990, 92) is only partly tenable here. The

translator as secondary witness is ethically bound to listen to the recoverable goals of the survivor, but also to those moments where communication collapses into silence or haunting returns. Moreover, the translator must resist the displacement (or misplacement) of what the survivor knows and cannot know into their own epistemological frames, in order to avoid betraying the illocutionary force and instability of the original testimony on the one hand and to allow the reader some access to destabilizing effects of trauma on the other.

Situating *The Human Race*

Before progressing to the textual and discursal analysis, the secondary witnessing inherent in *The Human Race* must first be understood as a product of its socio-cultural setting. In this sense, the communicative context of the translated testimony differs significantly from that of the original with regard to time, space and function. To begin, it would appear that the very subject matter of *L'espèce humaine* worked against Antelme since his attempt to communicate was met with opposition in the years immediately following the war: "And they beg: 'That was not real life – forget!'" (1996, 44). This call to forget the inconceivable atrocities of the war on the part of the survivor's interlocutors can be understood in reference to Henry Rousso's (1987) typology of the national French reaction to "les années noires", where the first (1947) and second (1957) editions of *L'espèce humaine* span the periods of unfinished mourning (1944-1954) and of repressed memory (1955-1971), respectively. Throughout this time, there was a reticence to confront the painful, perplexing issue of collaboration, and the de Gaullist myth of resistance was perpetuated as balm for the collective memory. Remembering therefore converged on acts of national heroism, while the more thorny questions were pushed out of focus. However, the collective conscience does then move into the period of myth breaking (1972-1980), and subsequently to that of obsession (1980 onwards), where the injustices, moral dilemmas and traumas of the past begin to be recovered and confronted. Antelme's work and its emphasis on human resistance in the face of the most adverse of conditions is simultaneously recovered in the source culture as a counterpoint to the preceding, singular emphasis on the resistance movement. As Colin Davis (2003, 41) notes, this renewal in interest can further be related to the publication in 1985 of Duras' semi-autobiographical work, *La Douleur*, which tells of her then husband's return from the camps and occasioned numerous comparative studies between the two accounts.

Published by Marlboro Press in 1992, the translation appears forty-five years after the initial publication of Antelme's memoir in France. This extensive gap may in part be

explained by the enduring hostility in the source culture towards the content of *L'espèce humaine* which then substantially deferred recognition of the survivor as one of the “most important concentration camp authors” (ibid., 42). In other words, opposition to the field of discourse in one context impeded the basic conditions for communication in another. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that the heightened capital of the source text in the mid-80s reinforced its testimonial significance abroad and paved the way for the English version. The decision to translate *L'espèce humaine* in the early 90s for a US audience may also have been consolidated by several other factors, not least Antelme's death in October 1990; the translation thus becomes a timely tribute to a voice that had once struggled to be heard. However, a *New York Times* review of the translation highlights a more unfortunate intersection between the work and its communicative situation:

Today a revisionist industry, fostered by racialsists and deviant publishers and authors, as well as human perversity, is presenting the Holocaust as a Jewish hoax and proclaiming ignorance of the camps. [...] Such pernicious rubbish adds value to ‘The Human Race.’ (Vansittart 1992, 22)

The ethical obligation which falls to the translator as secondary witness is thus brought into even sharper relief. Not only does the target text represent a recovery of the survivor's testimony, but it also adopts a greater metaphorical significance as a bulwark against those who deny the atrocities.

Telling it as it was

The following comparative study will explore the extent to which Haight and Mahler, as secondary witnesses, have listened to and perpetuated Antelme's communicative goals by evaluating the potential within the translation for the reader to re-experience, and therefore respond to, the illocutionary force of the original testimony. This potential is contingent on the semiotic dimension, and so the comparison will centre on “the syntactic, semantic and/or pragmatic properties of the sign” (Hatim and Mason 1990, 116), or signs, as chosen by the secondary witnesses. To begin, the analysis will engage with Antelme's desire to tell of life in the camps as it was, not forgetting the survivor's textual strategy of choosing and imagining as a means of working through the choking effects of trauma. As Georges Perec notes, Antelme's universe is a narrow one: “the camp [...] is mud, then hunger, then cold, then blows, then hunger again, then lice” (1996, 178). Such are the visceral hardships to which Antelme frequently returns, but focus will be restricted here to only three phenomenological facets, namely cold, sound and hunger.

Given that Antelme's representation of life in the camps was hard-won, it is fundamental that any act of secondary witnessing listens attentively to each and every textual sign which the survivor has chosen. To omit any element from the original telling would be tantamount to a rupture in the illocutionary structure of the text, responsible for "determining its progression and supporting its coherence" (Hatim and Mason 1990, 77). However, one such rupture comes to light when the survivor's experience of forced labour in unforgiving conditions is re-witnessed in English. Recalling the physical hardship of working outside in winter, Antelme writes:

Les yeux pleurent. Je glisse sur la glace; en me remettant d'aplomb, je reçois le panneau sur le côté gauche de la mâchoire. Brûlure de la glace, de la neige dans le cou. J'appuie le menton contre le chiffon que j'ai autour du cou. (1957, 160)

[The eyes water. I slip on the ice; when finding my balance again, I get the panel in the left side of the jaw. Burning of ice, of snow on the neck. I press the chin into the rag that I have around the neck.]

In an apparent oversight – or lapse of listening – the translators fail to incorporate the final sentence, so that the survivor's experience of the cold is reduced to: "We have tears in our eyes. I slip on the ice; trying to regain my balance, I get the panel on the left side of my jaw. Burning from the ice; snow down my neck" (1992, 147). Albeit briefly, the structure of the original testimony is discontinued; the non-transmission of Antelme's attempt to brace himself against the biting cold equates to the circumscription of interpretative potential as the translation reader is denied an insight into the original witness's embodied understanding of that frigid, hostile environment.

Antelme's testimony is further marked by semantic choices which attempt to echo the horrifying soundscape of his death march to Dachau: "La rafale. Toujours la même chose, les coups en vrac, comme un tombereau qu'on renverse, puis des coups isolés. [The burst of gunfire. Always the same thing, the erratic shots, like a dumper truck being emptied, then some isolated shots.]" (1957, 253). At this haunting juncture, the role played by creative choice becomes all the more significant; while the witness may have no means of understanding why this event repeats itself, he does have a greater degree of control over his description of how it happens. But the acoustic space created for the translation reader is of differing dimensions, resounding as: "A burst of gunfire. It's always the same, a deluge of shots, like a dumping-cart being unloaded; then isolated shots." (1992, 231). Although the secondary witnesses pay reasonable heed to the disquieting lack of transitivity in the original account, the semantic relations which "obtain between the sign and those entities to which it

refers in the real world” (Hatim and Mason 1990, 116) are substantially modified. For Antelme, the death march is repeatedly punctuated by the unmistakable and terrorizing sound of “*la rafale*”, a fearfully familiar eruption diminished by the secondary witnesses who hear only “*a burst of gunfire*”, an apparently isolated and indeterminate sound. This muffled move from definite to indefinite article is repeated with “*a deluge of shots*”. Of further significance here is the way in which the sound is re-qualified; the accent in the translated testimony is placed on the amplitude of the action, with the result that the terrifyingly arbitrary and unpredictable nature of shots fired by the SS “*en vrac*”, haphazardly, is drowned out. In this instance, the illocutionary force of Antelme’s working through is mitigated, and although the target-language account retains the potential to exert a perturbing effect in the reader, it does so to the detriment of the specific semantic choices embedded in the original testimony.

Another tortured refrain runs through Antelme’s narrative, this one attesting to the pervasiveness and physical manifestations of hunger: “*Toujours le poids de l’estomac vide, les mâchoires immobiles, la lourdeur de leurs os* [Always the weight of the empty stomach, the immobile jaws, the heaviness of their bones” (1957, 96). The intensity of Antelme’s hunger is so great that the witness depicts himself as the sum of stomach and jaws. Although French typically uses definite articles with body parts, their presence in this case simultaneously carries a connotative weight, drawing attention to the disunion, inflicted by hunger, between the experiencing self and its physical form. In Maurice Blanchot’s words, Antelme becomes “displaced from [him]self, a stranger to [him]self” (1996, 81). But the poignancy of this disjuncture is perhaps most evident when its reversal in the translated account is considered: “Always, the weight of our empty stomach. Our unmoving jaws. The heaviness of our bones” (1992, 86). Aligning the use of determiners to target language norms, the secondary witnesses re-qualify Antelme’s stomach, jaws and jawbones with a possessive pronoun, and in so doing reunite mind and matter, where the one possesses the other. In other words, the translators have appropriated the fractured markers of the original testimony by forcing them to conform to their own mode of speaking. But not only does this appropriation belie the traumatic impact of hunger, it also extends the frame of reference to a collective one with reference to “our empty stomach”. While this move speaks to Antelme’s emphasis on the indivisibility of the human species, it nevertheless proposes a greater sense of fraternity than is evoked in the witness’s universe; there, hunger was very much an individual experience which, more than anything else, strained the bonds between fellow prisoners. Consequently, Antelme’s presumed intention undergoes considerable modification in

secondary witnessing where the reader is presented with a skewed window on to the suffering of starvation.

In cruel opposition to the descriptions of hunger, Antelme's accounts of eating are more sporadic and detailed. One isolated example is the witness's description of a ration of toasted bread and mince:

ça luisait. J'ai croqué la première bouchée; en entrant dans le pain, les dents ont fait un bruit qui m'a rempli les oreilles. C'était une grotte de parfum, de jus, de nourriture. (1957, 118)

[it was glistening. I crunched into the first mouthful; when going into the bread, my teeth made a noise that filled my ears. It was a cavern of flavour, of juice, of nourishment]

The illocutionary force of this episode stems in no small part from its poetic treatment, in that food's scarcity finds its expression in a figurative language seldom used by Antelme. The secondary witnesses retell this experience as: "the fat [...] made it glow. I bit off the first mouthful; as they sank into the bread, my teeth made a noise that filled my ears. It was a paradise of perfume, of juice and food" (1992, 107). In this instance, certain perceptual elements have been reframed in such a way as to detract from their original intensity and particularities. The crunch of Antelme's first bite is absent from the translation – an absence all the more pertinent within the universe of the camps – and therefore restricts the phenomenological vista for the reader. Also, the implication of dryness, and by extension of deprivation, inherent in that onomatopoeia is less apparent in the translated experience of teeth that "sank into the bread", unimpeded by its staleness. Similarly, the secondary witnesses perhaps overstate the solace brought by the mouthful of food in their inclusion of conspicuously positive imagery. Where Antelme's allusion to a "cavern" evokes what is dark and foreboding, thereby disavowing any total relief from his execrable surroundings, the "paradise of perfume" in the secondary account is at stark variance with the inescapable hell of the camps.

The secondary witnesses have thus listened to, retold and, in some cases, appropriated Antelme's original account through a succession of omissions (his efforts to protect himself from the cold; the arbitrariness of the SS shootings), curtailments (the repetition of the SS shootings), and reversals (the dispossession and solitariness provoked by hunger; the ever-present horror of the concentrationary universe). At the same time, however, the example above provides an instance where the understanding of the translation reader can be enhanced rather than impeded through the act of secondary witnessing. There, the translators' atypical

collocational choices – the *glowing* and the *perfume* of the bread – inscribe the narrative with a sense of incongruity which obliquely mirrors the epistemological chasm between the world of the prisoners and that of the reader. But such gain proves to be the exception rather than the rule. Although the cases outlined here cannot claim to be wholly representative, they do point to a palpable drift in the translation away from the semiotic choices of the original, and thus away from its illocutionary structure and force. The reader of *The Human Race* is subsequently brought to an understanding of life in the camps which is less complete and less exacting than the original telling.

The indivisibility of the human species

As his title suggests, Antelme's account of daily life in the camps has an anthropological corollary, one which bears further witness to the defiance of a unified human species in the face of an SS apparatus bent on annihilation. It is this very attempt by the SS to divide and exclude that gives impetus to his testimony, where the emphasis on unity can be read as line of defence against their brutal strategy. That is not to say that Antelme disallows any sign of human frailty or destruction. Rather, as Martin Crowley discerns:

the shared humanity Antelme will affirm as his response to and rejection of the order of the camps is a force of resistance precisely inasmuch as it is a weak, fragile residue that is all the prisoners have left when all other attributes have been stripped away.”
(2002, 471)

It follows that translation as an act of secondary witnessing must allow the communicative intentions of the survivor to emerge on the broader level of discourse, understood by Hatim and Mason as those “modes of speaking and writing which involve participants in adopting a particular attitude towards areas of socio-cultural activity” (1990, 240). In Antelme's case, the ideological foregrounding of both the human species and its fallibility must be perpetuated in the retelling in order to preserve the resistant, analytical thrust of his working through.

The texture of the original testimony is marked by the frequent recurrence of the phrase “l'espèce humaine” as a core concept and value which transcends the fractured and unfathomable universe of the camps. This recurrence serves to create coherence in the sense that it “ensure[s] conceptual connectivity, including [...] continuity in human experience” (ibid., 195). Any lessening of that coherence in translation will consequently weaken Antelme's unifying thread of indivisibility, attenuating the link between this focal point and its wider anthropological and ethical significance. It is of note that the translation has not

opted for a literal rendition of the French title, i.e. for *The Human Species*, proposing instead a more common target-language collocation. At the outset, coherence is sustained in the translated preface through the recurrence of the titular phrase, focusing on contested membership of, belonging to and the limitations and characteristics of “the human race” (1992, 5-6). However, as the secondary witnessing progresses, coherence is mitigated as a result of the oscillation between “race” and “species”. Although the two classifications are used interchangeably in English, the resultant decline in the reiterative force of the original, sententious locution threatens to undermine its cohesive (in both the linguistic and anthropological sense of the word) role in the text. For example, where Antelme defiantly claims that “Le SS ne peut pas muter notre espèce. Ils sont eux-mêmes enfermés dans la même espèce et dans la même histoire [The SS cannot mutate our species. They themselves are immured in the same species and in the same history]” (1957, 83), the translation responds that “The SS cannot alter our species. They are themselves enclosed within the same humankind and the same history” (1992, 74). This is indicative of how the conceptual cornerstone of Antelme’s narrative can be undermined by an act of secondary witnessing which comes close to “stripping away” textual coherence; instigating a discontinuity with its own title, the translation divides the indivisible and blunts the original act of resistance.

For Antelme, the human species is also immutable, and his account bears witness to man’s resilience and his enduring belonging, despite and in the face of death. It is Blanchot who best captures this underlying tension when he remarks that its reading will bring us to an understanding “that man is indestructible and yet he can be destroyed” (1996, 77). This duality comes pointedly to the fore when Antelme recounts a visit to the camp sick bay. Searching for a friend, known only as K., Antelme encounters one patient with the following ravaged features: “Il avait un long nez, des creux à la place des joues, des yeux bleus à peu près éteints” [He had a long nose, hollows in the place of cheeks, blue eyes all but dead] (1957, 187). But these clearly defined attributes fail to reveal the identity of their bearer, who turns out to be K., at once alive but unidentifiable. Crowley observes that in Antelme’s testimony “a bodily image marks a point of ultimate fragility, and at the same time gives on to a sense of resistance” (2002, 472), so in order for this critical balance to be preserved on the level of discourse, the act of secondary witnessing must attest to both the physical effects of SS brutality and man’s struggle to resist.

The secondary witnesses recreate a portrait of a K. who “had a long nose and hollows instead of cheeks, eyes almost without expression” (1992, 172). In a glaring omission, the adjective “blue” which qualifies K.’s eyes in the original is not visible to the translation

reader. In a situation where the slightest, most frail human attribute can be regarded as an ideological act of resistance against obliteration, its denial in translation serves only to attenuate the force of such defiance. Or, as Daniel Dobbels puts it, “it is in [writing] that [Antelme] finds the strength to resist eradication, to resist that other blank which is the absence of perception” (1996, 10). By instigating an absence of perception, the secondary witnesses obscure a characteristic that the witness deems to be fundamental to the human species. On the other side of the resistance-fragility dichotomy, the corporeal fallibility of K. is such that his eyes are all but dead, the body having almost succumbed to its inhumane treatment. However, the re-encoding by the secondary witnesses conceals the moribund connotations of the original. To come full circle, any mitigation of K.’s physical fragility simultaneously downplays the tenacity of his, and by extension, man’s resistance.

It follows that the semiotic choices and omissions made by the translators in these examples have recorded and transmitted a less forceful version of Antelme’s humanistic ideal. The original witness’s insistence on the indivisibility of the human species is harder to hear where the secondary witnesses have fractured lexical coherence and excluded or recomposed minute, yet powerful, human features. These examples do not indicate a total rupture on the part of Haight and Mahler – for the very act of listening and responding is surely more welcome than silence. Yet, it is clear that the secondary witnesses play a critical role in the mediation of memory, and that only a careful and discerning act of listening can shape the translation reader’s understanding of the Holocaust in a manner called for by the survivor.

The translator as guardian

Whereas Hatim and Mason present the translator as a mediator who “stands at the centre of th[e] dynamic process of communication” (1990, 223), the positioning of the translator as secondary witness is at once more complex and more charged than this stance’s neutrality suggests. Not only must the translator negotiate a communication process which may be impeded by what Saul Friedländer (1992) terms the limits of representation, but he or she must also serve as “the enabler of the testimony – the one that triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and of its momentum” (Laub 1992, 58). Thus, the translator as secondary witness must carry the ethical burden of guardianship, a burden extending beyond the initial decision to translate into considerations of how to translate. The representational plight of the secondary witness has long been recognized, with Caruth calling attention to the fact that:

The difficulty of listening and responding to traumatic stories in a way that does not lose their impact, that does not reduce them to clichés or turn them all into versions of the same story, is a problem that remains central to the task of therapists, literary critics, neurobiologist, and filmmakers alike. (1995, vii)

But the task of the translator as a listener and responder to traumatic narratives has too long been overlooked.

In this respect, I have few reservations about proposing a prescriptive approach to secondary witnessing in Holocaust translation: that translators *must* listen perceptively; that they *must* strive towards an analogous reconstruction of the original testimony, its choosings and imaginings, its analytical attempts and its communicative intentions. For Haight and Mahler's guardianship is not always underpinned by an attentive act of listening, and as such, they lead the reader to a more restricted understanding of Antelme's suffering at the hands of, as well as his resistance to, the Nazi regime. It is perhaps Kofman who best captures the anguish behind the illocutionary force of *L'espèce humaine*: "to have to choke, such is the ethical exigency that Robert Antelme obeys" (1998, 39). In turn, to have to listen, such is the ethical exigency that the translator as guardian must obey. At worst, the translator as secondary witness can collapse the original testimony, silencing its intentions and choking the witness further still. But at best the translator can effectuate an act of secondary witnessing which preserves and perpetuates the contours of the survivor's memory, serving thus as a necessary and revelatory defense against forgetting.

Notes

¹ For a comprehensive overview of Levi's work on translation as metaphor and representation, see Alexander (2007).

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